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Preparing for Irregular Warfare

The Future Ain't What It Used to Be

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Tactically, the US Air Force performs superbly in a counterinsurgency (COIN) fight. Strategically, though, that fact is irrelevant; the critical capability involves building the partner nation's indigenous airpower—an essential distinction. The Air Force analyzes missions from the perspective of how it would conduct them, using all of its tactical and technical expertise. During COIN operations, this approach can easily influence us to take action ourselves. In the discussion that follows, the reader must constantly keep in mind the difference between doing COIN (the job of the local authorities) and enabling COIN (the role of external actors).

The continuing Air Force debate over how to meet the challenge of irregular warfare (IW) reflects the fact that the above distinction is not obvious. Can our existing forces and organizations successfully meet irregular challenges? Is the irregular threat more or less likely or dangerous than the conventional threat? How do we balance these competing requirements?

Regardless of the internal debate, our political leadership has clearly expressed a need for better IW capability. The national security strategy of 2006 calls for engagement in regional conflicts through prevention and resolution, intervention, and postconflict stabilization and reconstruction.¹ Similarly, the *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* of 2006 urges a shift in emphasis “from major conventional combat operations - to multiple irregular, asymmetric operations.”² The new administration has not changed this direction. Reportedly, dissatisfaction with the Air Force's focus on conventional, high-tech warfare, among other factors, led to the firing of its secretary and chief of staff in June 2008.³ Consider the “Revolt of the Admirals” in 1949, an incident that resulted in the firing of three Navy admirals, including Louis Denfeld, the chief of naval operations. At the time, the disagreement had to do with the relative merits and priorities of buying long-range nuclear bombers (B-36s) or building a new class of supercarriers (the USS *United States*) that could deliver nuclear strikes from forward locations. Is the F-22 our *United States*, or will we shift our priorities to build needed capabilities for IW?

To Remain Relevant in the Most Likely Conflicts of the Next 30 Years, the Air Force Must Be Able to Conduct Irregular Warfare

Contrary to doctrine and direction, the Air Force's actions make clear that it does not consider IW a priority. It's now fashionable in the Pentagon for airpower advocates to dismiss COIN as the “last war” and call for an all-out push for modernization to prepare for war with a technologically

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sophisticated peer or near-peer enemy.⁴ Despite an inability to predict our involvement in insurgencies after the initial phases of Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom, the Air Staff appears confident that such insurgencies will not occur again.

Yet, of the 14 major conflicts raging in the summer of 2008, none were conventional fights between nation-states.⁵ Of the 30 or so major conflicts of the past decade, only four occurred between nations.⁶ Today, places such as Sudan, Sri Lanka, Colombia, and the Philippines see wars between ethnic groups, insurgents, and religions. A recent RAND study found significant cause for concern in eight specific regions that lie effectively beyond the control of any recognized government.⁷ What is the likelihood of the US military's becoming involved in these conflicts?

We have used military force over 300 times in our history—a number that includes only 11 declared wars and a few more sustained conventional conflicts (e.g., Korea, Vietnam, the two Gulf Wars, etc.).⁸ Although military personnel may recommend that our political leadership avoid involvement in other nations' internal wars, it is not our decision. History shows that we must be ready and able to meet a full spectrum of challenges, which includes assisting other nations with internal conflicts.

IW does not generally threaten the survival of the United States; however, it poses significant threats to our interests in today's globalized environment. For example, irregular wars influence two of the five largest US oil suppliers—Nigeria and Venezuela. In Nigeria, local unrest and attacks on facilities and personnel in oil-producing areas have directly affected that country's oil exports. Venezuela harbors some Colombian insurgents, causing significant tensions in the area. In March 2008, Colombia demonstrated its willingness to conduct cross-border operations against those insurgents when it attacked and killed a rebel leader hiding in Ecuador. Escalating tensions in the region could easily involve the United States, given our ongoing support of the Colombian government.

I leave calculating the probabilities of conventional and irregular conflicts to the intelligence experts—hopefully wiser now after Iraqi Freedom. Regardless, the capability of irregular and conventional enemies has been amply demonstrated by the decades of terrorism culminating on 11 September 2001 and by the numerous civil wars and unconventional conflicts currently raging. In a rapidly changing and uncertain environment, we don't know what we don't know. Events of the future will be as unanticipated and momentous as the collapse of the Soviet Union or the attacks of 11 September. We can only develop as wide a range of capabilities as we can, including those needed for IW. So what are “irregular” capabilities (other than not regular)?

Irregular Challenges Cover the Spectrum, from Terrorism to Insurgencies and Civil War

Defining IW as a negative—everything that's *not* conventional warfare—does little to determine needed capabilities. Air Force doctrine defines it as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations,” a broad statement that essentially covers all violence aimed at causing political change, whatever the source.⁹ The military professional needs a more specific prescription.

That same doctrine does provide some clarification, however: “IW encompasses a spectrum of warfare where the nature and characteristics are significantly different from traditional war. It includes, but is not limited to, activities such as insurgency, [COIN], terrorism, and counterterrorism,” another “not conventional” definition.¹⁰ Violent political competition ranges from street demonstrations in Palestine, through terrorism in Colombia,

to full-scale civil war between conventional forces in Lebanon. However, within this violence a common thread exists that distinguishes irregular from conventional conflicts: it concerns not why but how the fight is conducted.

Conventional warfare entails fighting distinct, identifiable, and unambiguous military forces, whose defeat (as well as the destruction of their infrastructure) is a well-studied problem for conventional forces: identify centers of gravity and apply firepower. Regardless of the adversary force, when its members take the field as a distinct military entity, conventional tactics prove effective against them. After defeating the enemy's military forces, we decide that we have won if the enemy government has acceded to our demands or if we have destroyed that government and occupied its territory. Yet, conventional war plants the seeds for irregular war. If we occupy enemy territory, then we are vulnerable to continued irregular resistance.

In IW we fight enemies who intentionally remain ambiguous. They employ every type of violence but, for the most part, avoid operating as an identifiable armed force. This is not to say that they are not organized, do not call themselves an "army," and do not mass when they see an advantage. The point is that irregular opponents blend in with the population. Either their rear area, their sanctuary, lies outside the formal conflict arena or does not occupy a geographic area at all, existing instead within the local population. In the latter case, they do not cross a physical border to initiate hostilities. Military forces' role in the ultimate (political) victory is complete when they suppress violence to a level that allows a "normal" society to function. This scenario presents unique but not unprecedented challenges for military action.

The Military Aspect of These Challenges Is Well Covered under Counterinsurgency

The problem of dealing with organized, disaffected, and violent adversaries within a population is embedded in the notion of COIN, "those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency," the latter term defined as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict."¹¹ Our definition of insurgency, written from the perspective of the "constituted government," parallels that of IW, defined in a more objective fashion that focuses on the violent struggle between governments and insurgents for legitimacy. Other than the change in perspective, the struggle remains the same—to determine who will rule. We should, therefore, consider the lessons of COIN in developing forces for IW.

Remarkably, all the services agree on COIN doctrine in terms of its determining the legitimate government for a nation or society. Joint doctrine talks to "the building of viable institutions that respond to the needs of society."¹² Air Force doctrine takes aim at the struggle for legitimacy and influence over the population.¹³ Army and Marine Corps doctrine echoes this stance: "Political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate."¹⁴

The issue of legitimacy is complex, but the de facto standard of government legitimacy involves the ability to occupy and control territory—one of the ways we define a nation-state. Whether or not that control is coerced or freely granted by the population in return for government and social services simply constitutes a detail. Regardless, controlling a population means putting boots on the ground—forces aren't in control if they're not present or can't reach the location. Most importantly, a local authority must do the controlling with its own boots.¹⁵ Since the essence of legitimacy is

presence, every fight in a COIN battle occurs eyeball to eyeball and locally. The COIN battle turns on controlling the population, and we can't do that from a distance or solely from the air.

For the insurgent, success depends upon maintaining the initiative. By denying the government identifiable targets, the insurgent ensures that it can only react to his moves. By massing forces only at times and places of his choosing, he controls the pace and terms of the conflict.

By dispersing within the population, insurgents avoid presenting an unambiguous target readily distinguishable from noncombatants (or staying in external sanctuaries not accessible to government forces). Compared to conventional forces, they generate few traces susceptible to the collection of technical intelligence. Oftentimes, only the locals can provide the most relevant information—the identities of the insurgents.

Their proximity to the population turns any firepower advantage into a disadvantage insofar as the insurgents try to induce the United States or our partner nation to react with large-scale violence that might cause civilian casualties, destroy property, and demonstrate lack of concern for the citizenry's welfare. This can also have the secondary effect of increasing the insurgents' perceived legitimacy by raising their stature from that of violent criminals to an organized force that can legitimately compete with the partner nation's government.

Tactically, insurgents unencumbered by heavy weapons and armor can move on foot or in civilian vehicles among populated areas as fast as, or faster than, conventional military forces. Unlike government forces, who must be overt and identifiable in order to demonstrate their presence to the population, insurgents can remain indistinguishable from other civilians.

For the joint/combined force commander, this situation effectively limits friendly ground forces to parity with the insurgents in information, firepower, and mobility, making for a small-arms, small-unit fight. Only airpower can break this stalemate.

**The Value of Airpower in
Counterinsurgency Is Indisputable,
but Counterinsurgency Will Never
Become an Air-Centric Fight**

In the COIN environment, airpower allows friendly forces to see, move, and shoot, enabling them to dominate insurgents stuck on the ground. At the same time, the latter's need for low visibility effectively denies them significant air capabilities. Thus, threats to friendly air forces include only ground-based sabotage, small-arms fire/ antiaircraft artillery, and limited numbers of small surface-to-air missiles. For Airmen, this presents a uniquely asymmetric airpower equation.

Airpower enables small units operating in complex terrain to create, occupy, and exploit the high ground. Wide area, long-term surveillance and immediate overhead reconnaissance let friendly forces see the enemy and anticipate his actions, reducing the insurgent's ability to control the initiative and achieve tactical surprise.

Aerial mobility allows friendlies to respond to, pursue, or break contact with insurgents, returning the tactical initiative to government forces. This denies insurgents the ability to achieve local superiority by massing forces and limits the time they have to conduct an operation. Aerial mobility effectively converts their tactic of massing forces for local superiority into opportunities for government forces to identify and destroy them.

Airpower provides small units with immediate, precise, and scalable firepower. The immediate aerial backup changes the tactical equation from one of firepower parity to overwhelming friendly superiority. The precision of line-of-sight fires and guided weapons produces less collateral damage than the truck bombs or mortars in the insurgents' arsenal. Airpower offers a range of effects from area saturation with small-caliber weapons (miniguns) to artillery fire (with the AC-130's 105 mm howitzer) or destruction of hard targets (with Hellfire missiles and various precision-guided bombs). The friendly force can tailor the effects and direct them precisely to destroy insurgents while limiting collateral damage.

The Army's recent creation of Task Force Odin in Iraq reflects its understanding of the value of airpower and its willingness to pay for it.¹⁶ The Army created an ad hoc force of C-12 aircraft, Warrior and Shadow unmanned aircraft, and Apache helicopters tactically controlled by US and Iraqi ground force units to see, move to, and shoot bad guys. The Army diverted scarce resources to augment the capability supplied by the theater Air Force.

Yes, airpower is extremely relevant for COIN. Tactically, it gives small units the situational awareness, mobility, and firepower needed to overwhelm insurgents and exploits the insurgents' vulnerability by preventing them from massing forces or holding fixed positions. Yet, one must be careful not to overstate the value of airpower.

Lately, airpower advocates led by Maj Gen Charles Dunlap and Dr. Phillip Meilinger have called for an air-centric approach to COIN.¹⁷ Unfortunately, they have focused on its kinetic aspects—a strength of airpower—instead of the larger political battle, largely unaffected by airpower. One doesn't defeat an insurgency by killing insurgents—unless one is willing to kill the entire segment of society whose grievance gave rise to the insurgency. Those airpower advocates are like the discoverers of the wonder drug penicillin, which cures a myriad of bacterial infections, just as airpower quickly destroys identifiable insurgents. Alas, not all infections are bacterial, and penicillin is not effective against viral infections, just as airpower cannot provide the persistent, face-to-face contact needed to free citizens of the viral influence of insurgent activities in their neighborhoods.

The “air control” strategy of the Royal Air Force in Iraq during the 1920s and 1930s, often mentioned as a good example of air-centric COIN, used British airpower in conjunction with small ground forces to attack massed rebels and conduct reprisal attacks against their villages. Although it proved tactically successful in coercing local tribal authorities and protecting ground forces, it produced only temporary effects and did nothing to build local governance in the region. Of course, the British had no intention of establishing local institutions to compete with imperial influence.¹⁸

The military advantage of airpower's high ground becomes a disadvantage (or irrelevant) in other phases of COIN aimed at controlling populations, which live on the low ground. Airpower cannot provide the personal presence of a “cop on the corner,” nor does it provide basic community services. The local population can see and solicit assistance from ground forces and other government representatives in the local area, but they have essentially no contact with airpower. COIN and IW have to do with government legitimacy—governance up close and personal. Face-to-face contact is not airpower's strong point.

One must remember that COIN itself is *not* a military-centric fight, allocating no independent roles for land, air, or military forces in general. Strategic planning must occur at the interagency level with the partner nation, whose political agenda, local political considerations, and US interagency inputs must all become part of any planned military operation. In many cases, these considerations will shape or preclude military operations. In COIN the politicians *do* run the war. Airmen having expertise in IW/COIN must make an informed contribution to the strategy, but they do not drive it. This is war, but with a difference.

At best, military force is a necessary evil in COIN—useful for defeating military formations, establishing enough initial safety to allow local police and security forces to take control, and creating conditions favorable for local political and economic development. We demonstrated in Vietnam and Afghanistan that US military forces can utterly annihilate insurgents who mass or gather in conventional military formations. As we learned then, and are learning now in Iraq, conventional military forces find it very difficult to locate and deal with a dispersed insurgent force actively hiding in urban areas and within a population.

**Though Tactically Adept,
Well-Trained Conventional Forces
Have Proven Strategically and
Operationally Inept at
Doing Counterinsurgency**

If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

—Bernard Baruch

Ironically, today's "general purpose forces" are anything but that, having superbly adapted to the requirements of high-intensity mechanized conflict. We are currently organized, trained, and equipped to conduct conventional warfare—conflict between overt political entities using hierarchically organized military forces.

This would not pose a problem if insurgents presented us with a familiar target set and reacted in familiar ways. Unfortunately, they do not. Insurgents study history too, and those who do not learn are quickly removed from the "gene pool." The surviving insurgents design their strategies to negate conventional forces' advantages of mass and firepower.

Today, our Airmen have undergone excellent training to win a conventional war. Like all competent professionals, in an unfamiliar situation, we reach first for the tools we know best. Army/Marine Corps COIN doctrine elegantly recognizes this pitfall: "Military forces that successfully defeat insurgencies are usually those able to overcome their institutional inclination to wage conventional war against insurgents."¹⁹ Air Force doctrine may not say this as clearly but recognizes it implicitly: "IW is not a lesser-included form of traditional warfare."²⁰

A recent RAND study makes this point clearly and unambiguously. After briefly surveying US experience in small wars prior to 1960 and taking a closer look at the Vietnam War and current operations in Iraq, it found that small, flexible units unencumbered by conventional doctrine and organizations can successfully counter insurgent activity, both directly and working through local forces. Conventional forces, despite good COIN

planning and doctrine, wage COIN unsuccessfully, reflecting an outlook and organizational culture comfortable with decisive battle and firepower but not with the constraints of long-term politico-military operations with less-than-proficient allies.²¹

In our recent “surge” of combat forces in Iraq, we still see the desire to seek decisive battle with insurgents and maximize the use of our firepower advantage, despite the current emphasis on COIN education within the US Army. Our COIN doctrine emphasizes the protracted nature of the conflict and the need to build partner-nation governance and civil society along with military capability. The RAND study delivers a clear message—we have valid COIN doctrine, but doctrine on the shelf cannot compete with a lifetime of conventional education and training. We can do COIN—we just refuse or forget to.

Equally important is the fact that general-purpose forces are configured by design, training, and attitude to do the mission themselves, not through local proxies or a partner nation’s forces. This causes significant problems for COIN missions. Dr. Meilinger bemoans the fact that governments relying on US support are often portrayed and perceived as American “puppets,” to their disadvantage in the competition for legitimacy.²² This charge reflects an accurate perception of our conventional forces’ preferred operational patterns. The US military’s usual practice of arriving in overwhelming force and operating independently of another nation’s control reinforces the perception of the United States as an external player—an “imperialist.”

To gain and retain legitimacy, the host-nation government must give the appearance of being in charge. Our military can do this only by building up local forces to take the lead in fighting insurgents. A quick look at the Air Force’s “scorecard” for Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom shows that we have missed this point. Through July 2008, the Air Force Airpower Summary shows nothing about Iraqi Air Force operations and capabilities—only US and coalition sorties—though this has recently changed to reflect some local contributions.²³ To provide COIN capability and ensure that well-trained general-purpose forces focus on the conventional mission, we must remove the IW/COIN distraction from conventional forces by developing distinct organizations tailored to conduct IW/COIN.

Counterinsurgency Requires Forces Organized, Trained, and Equipped for the Mission

In conducting COIN, we concern ourselves not so much with the value of airpower as its source. External forces may serve as a stopgap, but they are not the solution. The Air Force needs to get serious about creating and sustaining indigenous airpower for COIN—building the 100-wing Air Force called for by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.²⁴ In short, we must create and sustain a foreign internal defense (FID) capability for the Air Force that can build those 60-odd additional wings for partner nations.

Creating both an institutional FID capability for the Air Force and a cadre of COIN experts to do the mission requires establishing a permanent wing focused on this mission. Why a wing? Because we fight, train, and allocate resources that way. The unit needs to consist of equal parts technical training wing and operational composite wing tailored for IW and COIN. Call it an IW Wing with a FID Group as its training component and a COIN Group as its operations arm.

The FID Group would create airpower for the host nation or fill gaps in its organization. Many countries facing insurgencies or harboring terrorists have no effective airpower. Some have aircraft but poor recruiting, training, command, or sustainment capabilities—core Air Force functions that we

can teach. The FID Group needs specialists in all of the organizational functions of the Air Force (organize, train, equip, and provide forces; develop doctrine; etc.) to build those capabilities in the partner nation so it can sustain the fight.

The COIN Group would teach airpower employment and establish initial capability, thus demonstrating the utility of airpower to partner nations. Charged with instructing them in the employment and control of forces (i.e., teaching tactics, planning, and command and control), the COIN Group needs a small complement of aircraft—not high or low tech but the right tech for the particular countries. The group’s weapon systems would provide mission proficiency, initial combat capability, and a model for partner-nation implementation. We should select weapons and support systems for their capability, affordability, maintainability, and commonality with other nations in a target region. Some nations can operate F-16s, but most cannot. The wing must have specialized systems, not because we need new capabilities but because systems should match the partner nation’s specific requirements and limitations.

Assuming that our strategy calls for transferring these systems to the partner nation, the IW Wing will need to own them. If not, it can lease them, which will reduce costs and enable the wing to change specific weapon systems rapidly to match the requirements of a variety of partner nations.

The COIN Group must possess a variety of capabilities (surveillance, airlift, strike) and a small combined air operations center for organic command and control for tens of sorties per day, not thousands. Squadron-sized elements of light strike; mobility; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and rotary-wing systems should be adequate. We should size the IW Wing so that it functions as a nucleus around which we develop the host nation’s capability rather than try to be a complete national air force.²⁵

This wing provides an initial, core combat capability. If the partner has no resources for confronting an advanced or large-scale insurgency, we can augment the IW Wing with a conventional Air Force air and space expeditionary force (AEF). Adept at destroying military targets, conventional forces can move effectively against insurgents operating massed forces or in the open. When we run out of those targets—usually very quickly—we withdraw the AEF and fall back behind the local government and the US political team supporting it. After having dealt with the initial threat, we need only a small force structure of unique aircraft to support COIN operations.

The IW Wing also gives the Air Force an incubator to nurture credible IW/COIN experts and strategists for the regional combatant commanders. To conduct IW successfully, we must spend just as much time educating leaders and shooters about it as we spend educating them about major theater wars of the past. Otherwise, we subject ourselves to a repeat of recent history—on-the-job training or a fallback to firepower-intensive, conventional operations. “Losing” man-hours to classroom education and field exercises is infinitely preferable to losing lives (mostly those of locals and our ground forces) in relearning how to fight dirty little wars.

FID teaches us the key lesson that the best equipment, training, and intentions won’t work unless we earn the respect of the partner nation’s personnel—and it takes time to build useful relationships with our counterparts. Although the AEF construct we use to present forces works for supporting conventional operations, short rotations of standard force modules do not lend themselves to the lasting associations demanded by effective FID. Rather, we must implement long-term deployment or recurring deployments of the same US personnel to a focus country, assuring that the wing’s internal organization features regionally oriented teams whose deployment cycles respond to the operational needs of the host nations. The IW Wing will be at war. If we can’t deploy the same individuals for the duration, then we must ensure that they deploy regularly.

Building relationships and mutual respect also requires that all personnel in contact with the partner nation make an investment in cultural and language skills. The IW Wing should maintain a variety of language qualifications attuned to likely areas of US interest. Intensively preparing a small number of individuals for the wing promises a bigger payoff than trying to provide everyone in the Air Force a smattering of language/cultural training.

Dedicated Irregular Warfare/ Counterinsurgency Forces Need Not Be Excessively Large or Expensive

Successful COIN requires the partner nation targeted by the insurgency to take the lead in operations. After all, the war is about who exercises governance over the population—and that isn't the United States. Thus, the partner nation must provide and pay for the bulk of the forces, and we must limit equipment and systems to those it can afford, operate, and sustain. As noted above, during IW/COIN, a wing-sized US force serving as the core of a partner nation's capability is more valuable than large numbers of US weapon systems. At the same time, the insurgents' need for stealth also effectively confines the threat to sabotage of friendly air forces, small-arms fire / antiaircraft artillery, and a few small surface-to-air missiles, which, in turn, reduces the technical and performance requirements—and cost—for airpower tailored to the COIN mission.

Choosing not to resource a dedicated IW/COIN organization and capability amounts to a false economy. The absence of an IW Wing forces us to use conventional means to fight irregular conflicts. Each day, conventional airpower proves that it can carry out the kinetic mission in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it does so at a horrendous cost: \$18 billion (\$8 billion in procurement and \$10 billion in operations and maintenance) to run the Air Force portion of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for fiscal year 2007. (From 2001 through 2007, the Air Force spent a total of \$63 billion for these operations.)²⁶

Keeping a fleet of B-1s, KC-10s, F-15s, TR-1s, and so forth, in the fight to drop a weapon occasionally in permissive airspace is a bit like hunting gnats with an elephant gun. Those weapon systems (and their supporting logistical and command and control structure) are invaluable against the massed forces of a technologically adept enemy, but in a COIN fight we use them at only a fraction of their potential, all the while consuming resources at full speed. Worse, these conventional forces contribute little or nothing to building capability for the partner nation. Spending \$1 billion a year on a dedicated COIN force instead of \$18 billion would take considerable pressure off the Air Force's sustainment and recapitalization accounts. Until we make the investment in people, organizations, and weapon systems dedicated to building host-nation airpower, we will face an endless and expensive grind of AEF deployments as our only option in unconventional conflicts.

Counterinsurgency Forces Must Satisfy the Criterion for US Victory in Irregular Warfare: We Go Home When the Partner Nation Can Take Over the Fight

At the tactical level, we have COIN doctrine. Significantly (perhaps unintentionally), at the joint/strategic level, we do not have COIN doctrine. We do have Joint Publication 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense (FID)*, and joint doctrine defines FID as “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the *action programs taken by another government* or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency” (emphasis added).²⁷ Intentional or not, this definition

recognizes the most fundamental, yet most often forgotten, key to victory in IW and/or COIN. An external power cannot “win” the war; it’s a fight for political legitimacy between local factions.

This is the most important point to remember in conducting COIN. Unless we intend to deploy forces indefinitely, we must build up partner-nation capabilities and legitimacy—which calls for a low-visibility effort that puts local forces in the lead as soon as possible. In the words of T. E. Lawrence, “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”²⁸ Thus, we think of victory in terms of the Iraqi Air Force’s flying Tucanos and Mi-17s adequately—not the US Air Force’s flying F-22s and CV-22s flawlessly.

In this area—building local airpower—the Air Force is failing. Its unmatched capability lies far beyond what most nations need or can achieve. Other than Air Force Special Operations Command’s 6th Special Operations Squadron and US Central Command Air Forces’ 370th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group (formerly the Coalition Air Force Transition Team), the Air Force has no organization or infrastructure dedicated to developing indigenous airpower. A small unit, the 6th focuses on tactically training existing local air forces to support the activities of special operations forces. The 370th has a larger complement and broader capability but functions as an ad hoc unit with no institutional infrastructure, training only Iraqi and Afghani air forces.

To do FID, we must dedicate an organization to that mission. If it’s not somebody’s job, then it’s nobody’s job. The United States cannot be the world’s policeman, but we can make sure the local cops are ready and able to police their own societies.

Notes

1. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2006), 15–16, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf>.

2. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 6 February 2006), vii, <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf>.

3. Julian E. Barnes and Peter Spiegel, “A Battle over ‘the Next War,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 2008, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-nextwar21-2008jul21,0,4824552.story> (accessed 1 August 2008).

4. This is the author’s opinion, based on numerous recent e-mail exchanges with action officers with the Air Force’s Air Staff, ranging in rank from major to colonel. Strictly speaking, the current violence in Iraq began as resistance to US occupation in the wake of a conventional war in 2003. That the enemy is using the strategies and tactics of insurgency reflects the usefulness of the model. It has now become a classic insurgency, with various factions fighting with the post-Saddam government of Iraq for legitimacy.

5. Doctrine for IW states that “the United States’ overwhelming dominance in recent conventional wars has made it highly unlikely that most adversaries will choose to fight the US in a traditional, conventional manner.” Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 1 August 2007, 1, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/usaf/afdd2-3.pdf>. The *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* explicitly calls for a shift in emphasis

from conventional to irregular operations (vi). According to the *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, June 2008), “We must display a mastery of irregular warfare comparable to that which we possess in conventional combat” (4).

6. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2008: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Summary* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2008), <http://yearbook2008.sipri.org/files/SIPRIYB08summary.pdf> (accessed 16 July 2008). The SIPRI report covers three conventional conflicts in Eritrea-Ethiopia, 1998–2000; India-Pakistan (Kargil), 1998–2003; and the US/coalition-Iraq, 2003. The fourth is the recent Russia/Georgia conflict over the status of South Ossetia.

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